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DOE FOR GEORGE PERSON

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: GAMBARI TO LEAD NEW NIGER DELTA COMMITTEE?

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

11. (C) Poloff met May 19 with Dr. Sam Amadi, a Special Assistant to Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe. Amadi said that Vice President Goodluck Jonathan's office is planning a "Consultative Steering Committee" (CSC) on the Niger Delta, which would be led by Professor Ibrahim Gambari, a Nigerian diplomat and scholar currently serving as Under Secretary General (Department of Political Affairs) at the United Nations. According to Amadi, in early May Gambari tentatively agreed to return to Nigeria and lead the CSC effort for the GON. However, the start of work was delayed while Gambari "wrapped up things in New York and obtained clearances from the UN for his leave of absence." (Note: According to Amadi, Gambari will be doing this work independently and not under UN auspices. End Note.) Dr. Amadi himself claims to be in discussions with Professor Gambari about becoming the Secretary of the CSC under Gambari's leadership. (NOTE: Ambassador was told by Foreign Minister Maduekwe May 29 that he was dispatched by President Yar'Adua to go and meet directly with the UNSEC General in order to secure Gambari's temporary release for July 2008 to begin the role to lead the CSC. The UNSEC General had been reluctant to do so prior to their meeting according to the Foreign Minister. END NOTE.)

12. (C) Amadi told Poloff that the GON already has a draft action plan which outlines ideas to improve security and pursue development in the Niger Delta. He said that the purpose of the Consultative Steering Committee is to gain the support of key stakeholders for this plan, refining it as necessary. The CSC will send "trained facilitators" out to individual villages and communities in the Niger Delta to explain the draft plan. Each community or interest group will be asked to look at the plan point by point, make suggested edits as needed, and then appoint one person to "sign off" on the plan as the community's official representative. After several months of exposing the plan to the public and obtaining grassroots support, the process is supposed to culminate in a "Niger Delta Summit" in Abuja, to which all the plan's "signatory representatives" will be invited. Dr. Amadi estimated that the consultation process would last several months, so the summit itself was not likely to happen before August 2008.

13. (C) Amadi stressed that in his view, the proposed CSC process is fundamentally different from past attempts to

solve the Niger Delta crisis. The GON has realized that they cannot make any progress by simply negotiating with militants, because doing so ignores the needs and wants of the ordinary citizens of the Niger Delta. Amadi contended that in the CSC process, militants will be treated as just another stakeholder, with no greater voice than ethnic groups, youth organizations, or villages.

¶4. (C) Comment: While we cannot confirm the details of Dr. Amadi's description of the CSC process, newspaper accounts in early June confirm that Ibrahim Gambari is indeed returning to Nigeria to play a role in the GON's Niger Delta initiatives. It appears that the GON has been making some plans to move forward on Niger Delta talks, albeit quietly and largely under the media radar screen. It remains to be seen whether Professor Gambari will be seen as a credible interlocutor by Niger Deltans, including militants, and it is not clear whether the consultation process described above will in practice be any different than previous meetings and summits, which have accomplished little. End Comment.
SANDERS